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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the potential role of outdoor education research in the formation of public policies on natural resource management, social issues, and education. Some current environmental, social, and educational problems include the lack of public knowledge about natural resources at a time of heightened and conflicting demands for those resources, the need to promote behaviors that conserve energy, the growing population of at-risk youth that is unresponsive to traditional educational approaches, and the need for learning experiences that children see as relevant to their lives. Outdoor education researchers commonly lament that both research funding and publication outlets are scarce, but these situations may have developed because outdoor education research has not addressed the important issues in our society. In the past, outdoor education research has been framed by the perspectives of White, upper middle-class, middle-aged men, and has ignored such issues as the nonparticipation in outdoor programs of people of color and the disadvantaged. Outdoor education researchers must look at their topics, research participants, and settings to determine if they are looking at a mirror of themselves or through the window of reality. In the natural resource arena, it is proposed that outdoor education and related research be broadened to include issues surrounding outdoor environments and the political processes influencing those environments. This paper lists 19 policy issues that could be addressed by outdoor education research, and includes a timeline of the development of outdoor education compared to U.S. and world history. (SV)

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OUTDOOR EDUCATION RESEARCH: IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL/EDUCATIONAL AND NATURAL RESOURCE POLICY

Alan Ewert
Leo McAvoy

Paper presented at
Second Annual Outdoor Education Research Symposium

January 14-16, 1994

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OUTDOOR EDUCATION RESEARCH: IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL/EDUCATIONAL AND NATURAL RESOURCE POLICY

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This paper discusses the relationships between outdoor education and public policy from the perspectives of natural resource management and social/educational systems. We present a historical and contemporary look at policy issues and conclude with recommendations on how the field of outdoor education can have a greater impact in the area of public policy.

KEY WORDS: *outdoor education, public policy, resource management, social/educational issues*

Introduction

Despite the longevity of research in the field of outdoor education, not much attention has been paid to the impact that research has on public policy or the effect that public policy has on research efforts. What few discussions have taken place on the issue have generally focused on the impact that research findings can or should have in the public policy and planning arena. However, it is both naive and misleading to think that public policy does not play a critical role in the development and direction-setting of many research efforts, particularly those funded from public and private non-profit sources.

This paper discusses the interface between outdoor education and public policy from the perspectives of natural resource management and social/educational systems. A historical and contemporary look at policy issues is presented. We conclude with recommendations on how outdoor education research can have a greater impact on public policy.

Current Situation

The field of natural resource management is faced with a widening array of issues that include global deforestation, environmental degradation, changing public values, conflicting demands for our natural resources, and a heightened interest in natural resources accompanied by a lessened knowledge about natural resource systems. What makes many of these issues so difficult to solve is that they are global in nature, cross-cutting in both scientific disciplines and governing jurisdictions; they involve a litany of neglect and will require solutions that are both expensive and long-term. Natural resource managers have not traditionally been adequately trained to deal with the public discourse and political process currently surrounding many of these natural resource issues (Cubbage, O'Laughlin, & Bullock, 1993). Moreover, if solutions to these issues are to be found, they will involve the potential for significant tradeoffs and changes in behavior.

Connected to both the natural resource and social/educational perspectives are the impacts that humans have on ecosystems. These impacts include the fragmentation of habitats, the introduction of exotic species, non-sustainable consumption, and the modification of atmospheric, physical, and biological characteristics of the environment. The role that human actions play on these

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systems cannot be overstated. While they are not fully developed, understanding these actions from a research perspective suggests that human behavior can be predicated on a variety of attributes including attitude formation, past experiences, communication strategies, and belief systems (Ewert, Chavez, & Magill, 1993; Manfredo, 1992). In these and similar issues are important components for outdoor education and environmental education programs and research. Moreover, increasing the knowledge base associated with constructs such as human behavior and attitude formation will play important an role in the development of public environmental and social/educational policy. For example, knowing that much of the public is less than knowledgeable about the linkage between energy use and global climate change has implications in designing educational curriculum and the development of economic incentives that are effective in modifying patterns of energy use.

Perhaps an even greater list of issues and problems relevant to outdoor education is present when one considers society from an educational perspective. A partial sampling of the concerns currently facing our society include a disparity in socio-economic status between the "haves" and the "have nots," family breakdown, racial misunderstandings and disharmony, a seemingly increased amount and degree of violence, misuse of leisure-time and the personal development and worth of the individual. One has only to look at some urban schools to see the manifestation of social/educational problems and the potential influence outdoor education may have on social and educational policy. Unemployment, family disruptions, absentee parents, poverty, and violence have created situations where an increasing number of children are living in inhospitable conditions where they are ill-fed, ill-clothed, and ill-cared for. These conditions have created a generation of youth-at-risk that seems to be unreceptive to traditional educational and social systems and approaches.

Many voices say our schools are terrible and getting worse. But educational reformer Carl Glickman (1993), in his recent book *Renewing America's Schools*, states that most American schools are not very different from the ones other generations of Americans attended. The students now are more diverse, and there are problems in certain schools. However, he believes that schools are not as bad as portrayed in the media. Glickman says the problem with our schools is their ordinariness. He states that "the reason many students do not do better in school is that these students do not see the relevance of such learning to altering and improving their immediate lives in the community" (p. 9). So, a key policy and research question here may be, how does outdoor education bring relevance to learning? How does outdoor education help alter and improve a child's immediate life in the community. How can outdoor education become a key ingredient in social and educational policy?

Historical Perspective

Before discussing some of the linkages between public policy, research, and outdoor education, it may be instructive to examine some historical events and milestones that have served to influence the outdoor education field. Any historical accounting of outdoor education must be made within the cultural and societal context of that particular era. Ford (1981) reports that outdoor education in schools and organized youth camps began in the 1800s. It should also be recognized, however, that there was a growing feeling in the nation at that time that our natural resources were not limitless and that education in general was becoming more removed from the land (Staley, 1979). It was not until the early 1930s that outdoor education programs similar to those in current use began to develop.

Table 1 breaks down the time period by decade from the 1930s to the present and lists significant outdoor education events with world and national occurrences. The 1930's saw the development of organized camps and school camping coinciding with the Great Depression, Dust Bowl, and the awakening of the importance of child development, as exemplified through numerous child labor laws. In the 1940s World War II and an explosive increase in prosperity coupled with technology influenced the

TABLE I

The Historical Interface Between Outdoor Education and U.S./World

U.S./World History	Outdoor Education
1930-1939	
• Depression	• Development of School Camping
• Minimum Wage, Child Labor Laws	• Organized Camps
1940-1949	
• World War II	• Further Development of School Camping
• Total Community Involvement	• Outdoor Education
• Increase in Technology and Urbanization	• Outdoor Laboratories
1950-1959	
• Korean War	• School Camp Is Out, Outdoor Education Is In
• Civil Rights Becomes an Issue	• Integration with the School Curriculum
• Commercial Nuclear Power, Sputnik	• AAHPERD/First Natl. Outdoor Education Conf. (1958)
1960-1969	
• Cuban Missile Crisis, Space Exploration	• Teacher Training, ESEA and Title III
• Johnson's Great Society	• Outdoor Ed. Textbooks, Journal of Outdoor Ed.
• Vietnam War, Increasing Social Unrest	• Second/Third Natl. Outdoor Ed. Conf. (1962, '66)
• Voting Rights Act	• Rapid Growth/Increased Funding
• Environmental Degradation	• Outdoor Ed. and Social Ills
• Woodstock/Washington DC Marches	• Environmental Ed. Appeals, Earth Day
• Wilderness Act	• Outward Bound and NOLS
1970-1979	
• Watergate	• Wilderness and Adventure Education
• End of Vietnam War	• Environmental Education Grows in Importance
• Oil Crisis	• Experiential-Based Learning (A.E.E. in 1977)
• Computer	• Special Populations
• Clearly Identifiable Social & Env. Problems	
1980-1989	
• Women's Rights	• Adventure Programs for Specific Groups (i.e., women, persons with disabilities, youth at risk)
• Exxon Valdez	• Wide Spectrum of Uses, Outdoor to Cure "Ills"
• Yellowstone Fires	• Liability Issues, Accreditation Standards
• Challenger Explosion	• National Wilderness Symposiums
• "Just Say No"	• President's Commission on Americans Outdoors
• Reduced Gov't. Spending on Soc. Svs.	• Conferences on Outdoor Recreation
• Growing Conflict over Environmental Issues	• Corporate Adventure Programs, Project Adventure
• Aging Population	
1990-2000	
• Americans With Disabilities Act	• Emphasis on Access and Integration
• Increased Concern about Social Issues	• Ecotourism
• Debate of Environmental Balance	• Council on Outdoor Education
• Rio Summit	• Coalition on Education in the Outdoors
	• Increased Emphasis on Environmental Ed. at all levels

development of outdoor laboratories and provided a complement to the learning of science. The 1950s period saw the integration of outdoor education with the broader school curriculum and was juxtaposed with the first commercial nuclear power plant, the Korean War and Sputnik. The turmoil and experimentation of the 1960s (Vietnam War, Civil Rights, social programs, attention to youth development) lead to a virtual explosion in new outdoor education opportunities. The 1970s saw a growing concern with environmental degradation and social justice, with the resulting increase in number and prominence of environmental and wilderness educational programs and attention directed to issues of gender and cultural equity. The 1980s featured a seemingly never-ending litany of environmental "disasters" such as the Yellowstone Fires and Exxon Valdez oil spill coupled with a growing mistrust of the effectiveness of government to solve problems. This was accompanied by the increased use of outdoor education to address social problems. Currently, societal concern is spread between issues such as the environment, economy, and increase in crime. It is not surprising that programs that attempt to provide some remedy to these situations have emerged. Components of these emerging trends include ecotourism, corporate programs, integrated outdoor education and adventure programs, programs for at-risk-youth, and adventure therapy programs (Ford & Blanchard, 1993; Gass, 1993; Schleien, McAvoy, Lais, & Rynders, 1993).

Research and Policy Directions

Framing the Issues: Are We Addressing the Big Questions?

Two common laments of outdoor education researchers are that there is little funding available to support outdoor education research and that there are few journals or other outlets to publish the findings of the research that is conducted. These problems may be because we are not addressing the important issues in our society—perhaps we just are not addressing the big questions. Research has sometimes been described as the process of looking through a window at reality. The window has a frame that guides our inquiry in a certain direction. That frame can contain a window that allows the researcher to see the reality on the other side, the reality of others, their situations, their diverse views. Or, the frame can contain a mirror where the researcher sees his or her own interests, biases, and reality reflected back (Style, 1988). Even when a researcher does look through the window (rather than the mirror), the frame of the window of research has usually, in the past, been that of white, upper middle-class, middle-aged men. This has, at times, resulted in a narrowly defined frame (Gilligan, 1982).

Some would charge that outdoor education researchers have for too long been looking at a mirror rather than through a window. As an example, much of the research in outdoor education has been directed toward participants in outdoor programs such as camps, environmental education centers, wilderness programs and adventure programs. These are relatively easy groups of subjects to contact and study, and many outdoor education researchers have work experience and professional contacts in these types of programs. But, since most of the participants on these programs are very much like the researchers, (a mirror image?), maybe we have been studying the wrong groups. Outdoor education programs often do not attract those we believe could benefit the most from these programs. These programs often fail to include persons of color, children who are suffering some of the major social injustices of our culture, the poor, or others who may feel disenfranchised (Ashley, 1990). Perhaps a more "window-like" research strategy would be to study those who do not participate in outdoor education and determine why they do not (Ewert, 1989). What are the potential impacts that participation would have on these non-participants?

To take the window-mirror analogy a bit further and suggest another needed research topic area, outdoor education programs attempt to have participants look through window frames to see the realities of others and the reality of the natural environment. Participants are also encouraged to look through mirrors to see and better understand their own reality reflected. Both the

window and the mirror are important in programming. The outdoor education staff often serve as the mirror for this reflection. Consider the situation of a participant who is a person of color, or has a disability, or is a woman. Since there are few staff members who are persons of color, or have disabilities or are women, this participant has few opportunities of finding an image of her/himself in the staff or other participants. This person cannot look into the mirror, there are only windows. The outdoor education researcher, on the other hand, usually is looking only into a mirror. Some observers would say that one of the main reasons outdoor education does not attract more persons of color or more persons from lower incomes is because they see no mirrors of themselves in the typical staff of an outdoor program. A relevant research topic may be why there are so few outdoor education staff persons of color, or who have disabilities, or who are female, and what strategies can be used to improve this situation.

Natural Resource Research Directions

Given that outdoor education and environmental education directions have not been orthogonal to the larger events surrounding society and nations, what are some of the important policy questions concerning outdoor education? We believe some of these policy questions in the natural resource arena include the following:

- Does contact with the natural environment provide a restorative element to persons living in congested, poor, disadvantaged areas (Bardwell, 1992)?
- What are the most effective models for delivering environmental education, especially in a school setting that includes disadvantaged children?
- How do environmental education and environmental literacy improve the life conditions in poor communities?
- How effective are various methods of utilizing education to influence environmental behavior?
- How should outdoor and environmental education be integrated into the institutions of society: through a total curriculum design or using selected interventions? What are the costs and benefits of each approach?
- If outdoor education opportunities are limited in number, how should these opportunities be made available to society? Should there be a universal access built around some type of rationing system, or should the programs be targeted to those who "need them the most" (youth-at-risk, teachers, tourists, inner-city -youth)?
- Should priority be given to outdoor and environmental education programs over traditional "guide and outfitters" services on federal and other public lands? What would be the rationale for such a decision?
- Should public funding be provided for outdoor and environmental education?

While the above list could easily be expanded, there is one overriding policy implication that outdoor and environmental education assumes. That is, these efforts provide a bridge between society, the natural environment, and technology. A number of scholars have argued that the public has both a "stake" in the outcomes of numerous policy-making efforts and can contribute important views and insights into those issues (Holman & Dutton, 1978). Brooks (1984) suggests that participation in technically intensive issues is often inhibited by lack of knowledge about the subjects and the decision-making process. It is here, in the education of the public about the issues in natural resource management and the decision-making process for the development of public policy, that outdoor and environmental education can make the most significant contributions to societal development.

Outdoor education has traditionally been considered education for, about, and in the outdoors. We are proposing that outdoor education be broadened to include the issues surrounding the outdoor environment and the political processes that work to influence those environments. Outdoor education research should also approach this expanded arena. Using this approach provides outdoor education with an avenue that can be used to reach and engage adult learners who also vote, pay taxes, and should have a voice in

environmental policy. For example, Porter and Brown (1991) suggest that global climate change, as a manifestation of greenhouse warming, is a prototype of the global commons issue. Yet, how many Americans are cognizant of what a "commons" is, or what the global commons are (i.e., atmosphere, oceans, Antarctica, etc.)? What contribution does the campfire, commonly used in the outdoor education setting, make in intensifying greenhouse warming? Moreover, how can the "average" citizen influence local, national, and global political and market systems that control behaviors such as energy use and land-use development? Outdoor education efforts could play an important role in making both children and adults, more aware of the global climate change issue, what the various options are, and how the political process works to influence change. In addition, the outdoor education and recreation setting often provides the only avenue for many Americans to experience the outdoor environment and observe first-hand the effects of the myriad of environmental issues facing our society (Ewert, 1991).

Social and Educational Research Directions

The following are some of the major policy issues that outdoor education research needs to address in the educational and social areas:

- Outdoor education has been shown to have positive impacts on self-efficacy (Priest, 1992), but work needs to be done studying the long term transference of changes in self-efficacy to life situations. We may find that outdoor education increases the self-efficacy of an African-American girl living in poverty. But, does that increase in self-efficacy improve her life in the community. If so, how?
- What are the impacts of outdoor education on the observable behaviors in schools or in other settings? Does outdoor education influence behaviors like attendance, involvement levels, service to the community, productivity, frequency, and quality of social interactions? Again, can we respond to the "so what?" criticism of outdoor education programs?
- How does outdoor education increase the problem-solving ability of a group? Then, how does the group use this improved problem solving ability to improve the work environment, or the school/learning climate, or the climate in the community where group members live and work?
- What are the outdoor education leadership models that would be most effective in generating positive individual and group development (McAvoy, Mitten, Steckart, & Stringer, 1992)?
- Why is there not more cultural and gender diversity among outdoor education staffs? What are appropriate strategies for increasing cultural and gender diversity in outdoor education staffs and in program participants?
- What is the effectiveness of therapeutic adventure programs? What type of treatment, by whom, is most effective, for which type of clients, in what circumstances, and for which problems (Gillis, 1992)?
- Some have said that therapeutic outdoor education may be most effective in client evaluation. If this is so, how does it aid in evaluating a client's problems and potentials?
- How can therapeutic outdoor education fit with or be integrated into other treatment approaches?
- Outdoor education has been included in treatment approaches in the criminal justice system. What long range impacts does outdoor education have on the life conditions of criminal justice system clients?
- Regarding persons with disabilities, what is the role of outdoor education in achieving social integration of person with and without disabilities?
- What are the specific components of an integrated outdoor education experience that influence personal growth, self-efficacy, and life style changes with persons with disabilities?

Again, an observer comes back to the question, are we as outdoor education researchers addressing the important educational and social issues in our society? Are we asking the big questions? An outside observer may say no to both. Outdoor education programs and research are often conducted away from the major social institutions of our culture. Instead, outdoor education research often takes place in relatively safe, isolated settings such as camps, forests, wilderness areas, ropes courses, parks, and at environmental education centers. If outdoor education research is to be taken seriously, if researchers hope to validate outdoor education as a major social and educational movement, perhaps researchers need to go into the schools, urban centers, housing projects, prisons, health centers, and the work place to study the influences of outdoor education. Outdoor education researchers hoping to address the major social and educational issues of our times need to look at their topics, research participants, and settings to determine if they are looking at a mirror of themselves or through the window of reality. They need to do this to reach a clearer understanding of a diverse set of people and the reality of their life conditions.

Conclusions

Outdoor education will probably never achieve the high national visibility enjoyed by other disciplines such as psychology, forestry, education, or the physical sciences. Nevertheless, this field can play an important role in a number of areas, because it provides a bridge between society, technology, and natural resources. In addition, outdoor education allows the participant to come into direct contact with other people, other communities, and the natural environment to form all-important personally meaningful links with the outdoor setting. Outdoor education programs should be including dialogue and learning opportunities on topics such as ethics, environmental policy issues, social equity and justice, public participation in decision making, and human and natural resource utilization. In like manner, outdoor education researchers should be looking through a window of reality and concentrating on the life conditions of real people in real communities and in real natural environments.

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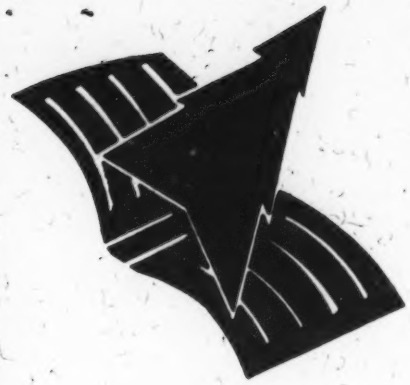

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COALITION FOR EDUCATION IN THE OUTDOORS SECOND RESEARCH SYMPOSIUM PROCEEDINGS

January 14-16, 1994
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The Coalition for Education in the Outdoors

COALITION FOR EDUCATION IN THE OUTDOORS

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The Coalition for Education in the Outdoors initiated a Research Task Force in 1990 with the purpose of supporting the conduct of research in the field and the dissemination of the results. The symposium at Bradford Woods and these *Proceedings* offer evidence of the success of this task force. At the first symposium in 1992, there was general agreement that the symposium be a regular occurrence. The 1994 Symposium and these *Proceedings* are indicators of the Coalition's continued support of research in outdoor education. Information on future events will be available through the Coalition Office.

COALITION FOR EDUCATION IN THE OUTDOORS
SECOND RESEARCH SYMPOSIUM PROCEEDINGS

JANUARY 14 – 16, 1994

Bradford Woods, Indiana

The *Coalition for Education in the Outdoors* is a network of institutions, organizations, agencies, centers, businesses, and associations linked and communicating in support of the broad purposes of educating in, for, and about the outdoors. The Coalition assists in identifying the needs of its affiliates and the field of outdoor education and seeks to find ways to assist in meeting those needs. The Coalition attempts to empower its affiliates in meeting their various constituent needs, as well as advancing the mission of outdoor education globally.

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THE COALITION FOR EDUCATION IN THE OUTDOORS
SECOND RESEARCH SYMPOSIUM PROCEEDINGS
1994

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Second Coalition for Education in the Outdoors National Conference
27th Annual New York State Outdoor Education Association Conference

Reconnecting With Nature: A Vision for the Future

October 7-10, 1994
State University of New York, College at Cortland
Cortland, New York

Conference Highlights

- Nationally Known Experts on Environmental and Outdoor Education
- Panels on Major Issues Affecting Fields of Environmental and Outdoor Education
- Over 70 Educational Workshops
- Interactive Resource Fair, Plus Book Fair
- Field Trips
- Networking Opportunities
- Entertainment

Sponsors: Coalition for Education in the Outdoors, New York State Outdoor Education Association, Cortland College Center for Environmental and Outdoor Education, Coalition of Living Museums